

time, to avoid being charged, if such is the case.

(h) *Other practices prohibited through the centralized source.* The centralized source shall not:

(1) Contain hyperlinks to commercial or proprietary websites until after the consumer has obtained his or her annual file disclosure, except for technical transfers to a web page on which consumers can request their free annual file disclosure; provided, however, that no hyperlinks to commercial websites shall appear on the initial page of the centralized source.

(2) Require consumers to set up an account in connection with obtaining an annual file disclosure; or

(3) Ask or require consumers to agree to terms or conditions in connection with obtaining an annual file disclosure.

[75 FR 9744, Mar. 3, 2010]

§ 610.3 Streamlined process for requesting annual file disclosures from nationwide specialty consumer reporting agencies.

(a) *Streamlined process requirements.* Any nationwide specialty consumer reporting agency shall have a streamlined process for accepting and processing consumer requests for annual file disclosures. The streamlined process required by this part shall:

(1) Enable consumers to request annual file disclosures by a toll-free telephone number that:

(i) Provides clear and prominent instructions for requesting disclosures by any additional available request methods, that do not interfere with, detract from, contradict, or otherwise undermine the ability of consumers to obtain annual file disclosures through the streamlined process required by this part;

(ii) Is published, in conjunction with all other published numbers for the nationwide specialty consumer reporting agency, in any telephone directory in which any telephone number for the nationwide specialty consumer reporting agency is published; and

(iii) Is clearly and prominently posted on any website owned or maintained by the nationwide specialty consumer reporting agency that is related to consumer reporting, along with instruc-

tions for requesting disclosures by any additional available request methods; and

(2) Be designed, funded, implemented, maintained, and operated in a manner that:

(i) Has adequate capacity to accept requests from the reasonably anticipated volume of consumers contacting the nationwide specialty consumer reporting agency through the streamlined process, as determined in compliance with paragraph (b) of this section;

(ii) Collects only as much personal information as is reasonably necessary to properly identify the consumer as required under the Fair Credit Reporting Act, section 610(a)(1), 15 U.S.C. 1681h(a)(1), and other applicable laws and regulations; and

(iii) Provides clear and easily understandable information and instructions to consumers, including but not necessarily limited to:

(A) Providing information on the status of the consumers request while the consumer is in the process of making a request;

(B) For a website request method, providing access to a “help” or “frequently asked questions” screen, which includes more specific information that consumers might reasonably need to order their file disclosure, the answers to questions that consumers might reasonably ask, and instructions whereby a consumer may file a complaint with the nationwide specialty consumer reporting agency and with the Federal Trade Commission; and

(C) In the event that a consumer requesting a file disclosure cannot be properly identified in accordance with the Fair Credit Reporting Act, section 610(a)(1), 15 U.S.C. 1681h(a)(1), and other applicable laws and regulations, providing a statement that the consumers identity cannot be verified; and directions on how to complete the request, including what additional information or documentation will be required to complete the request, and how to submit such information.

(b) *Requirement to anticipate.* A nationwide specialty consumer reporting agency shall implement reasonable procedures to anticipate, and respond to, the volume of consumers who will

contact the nationwide specialty consumer reporting agency through the streamlined process to request, or attempt to request, file disclosures, including developing and implementing contingency plans to address circumstances that are reasonably likely to occur and that may materially and adversely impact the operation of the nationwide specialty consumer reporting agency, a request method, or the streamlined process.

(1) The contingency plans required by this section shall include reasonable measures to minimize the impact of such circumstances on the operation of the streamlined process and on consumers contacting, or attempting to contact, the nationwide specialty consumer reporting agency through the streamlined process.

(i) Such reasonable measures to minimize impact shall include, but are not necessarily limited to:

(A) To the extent reasonably practicable under the circumstances, providing information to consumers on how to use another available request method;

(B) To the extent reasonably practicable under the circumstances, communicating, to a consumer who attempts but is unable to make a request, the fact that a condition exists that has precluded the nationwide specialty consumer reporting agency from accepting all requests, and the period of time after which the agency is reasonably anticipated to be able to accept the consumers request for an annual file disclosure; and

(C) Taking all reasonable steps to restore the streamlined process to normal operating status as quickly as reasonably practicable under the circumstances.

(ii) Measures to minimize impact may also include, as appropriate, collecting request information but declining to accept the request for processing until a reasonable later time, provided that the consumer is clearly and prominently informed, to the extent reasonably practicable under the circumstances, of when the request will be accepted for processing.

(2) A nationwide specialty consumer reporting agency shall not be deemed in violation of section 610.3(a)(2)(i) if

the toll-free telephone number required by this part is unavailable to accept requests for a reasonable period of time for purposes of conducting maintenance on the request method, provided that the nationwide specialty consumer reporting agency makes other request methods available to consumers during such time.

(c) *High request volume and extraordinary request volume*—(1) *High request volume*. Provided that the nationwide specialty consumer reporting agency has implemented reasonable procedures developed in accordance with paragraph (b) of this section, entitled “requirement to anticipate,” a nationwide specialty consumer reporting agency shall not be deemed in violation of paragraph (a)(2)(i) of this section for any period of time during which a streamlined process request method or the nationwide specialty consumer reporting agency experiences high request volume, if the nationwide specialty consumer reporting agency:

(i) Collects all consumer request information and delays accepting the request for processing until a reasonable later time; and

(ii) Clearly and prominently informs the consumer of when the request will be accepted for processing.

(2) *Extraordinary request volume*. Provided that the nationwide specialty consumer reporting agency has implemented reasonable procedures developed in accordance with paragraph (b) of this section, entitled “requirement to anticipate,” a nationwide specialty consumer reporting agency shall not be deemed in violation of paragraph (a)(2)(i) of this section for any period of time during which a streamlined process request method or the nationwide specialty consumer reporting agency experiences extraordinary request volume.

(d) *Information use and disclosure*. Any personally identifiable information collected from consumers as a result of a request for annual file disclosure, or other disclosure required by the Fair Credit Reporting Act, made through the streamlined process, may be used or disclosed by the nationwide specialty consumer reporting agency only:

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(1) To provide the annual file disclosure or other disclosure required under the FCRA requested by the consumer;

(2) To process a transaction requested by the consumer at the same time as a request for annual file disclosure or other disclosure;

(3) To comply with applicable legal requirements, including those imposed by the Fair Credit Reporting Act and this part; and

(4) To update personally identifiable information already maintained by the nationwide specialty consumer reporting agency for the purpose of providing consumer reports, provided that the nationwide specialty consumer reporting agency uses and discloses the updated personally identifiable information subject to the same restrictions that would apply, under any applicable provision of law or regulation, to the information updated or replaced.

(e) *Requirement to accept or redirect requests.* If a consumer requests an annual file disclosure through a method other than the streamlined process established by the nationwide specialty consumer reporting agency in compliance with this part, a nationwide specialty consumer reporting agency shall:

(1) Accept the consumers request; or

(2) Instruct the consumer how to make the request using the streamlined process required by this part.

(f) *Effective date.* This section shall become effective on December 1, 2004.

[69 FR 35496, June 24, 2004, as amended at 75 FR 9745, Mar. 3, 2010]

§ 610.4 Prevention of deceptive marketing of free credit reports.

(a) For purposes of this section:

(1) *AnnualCreditReport.com and 877-322-8228* means the Uniform Resource Locator address “AnnualCreditReport.com” and toll-free telephone number, 877-322-8228. These are the locator address and toll-free telephone number currently used by the centralized source. If the locator address or toll-free telephone number changes in the future, the new address or telephone number shall be substituted within a reasonable time.

(2) *Free credit report* means a file disclosure prepared by or obtained from, directly or indirectly, a nationwide

consumer reporting agency (as defined in section 603(p) of the Fair Credit Reporting Act), that is represented, either expressly or impliedly, to be available to the consumer at no cost if the consumer purchases a product or service, or agrees to purchase a product or service subject to cancellation.

(3) *General requirements for disclosures.* The disclosures covered by paragraph (b) of this section shall contain only the prescribed content and comply with the following requirements:

(i) All disclosures shall be prominent;

(ii) All disclosures shall be made in the same language as that principally used in the advertisement;

(iii) Visual disclosures shall be easily readable; in a high degree of contrast from the immediate background on which it appears; in a format so that the disclosure is distinct from other text, such as inside a border; in a distinct type style, such as bold; and parallel to the base of the advertisement or screen;

(iv) Audio disclosures shall be delivered in a slow and deliberate manner and in a reasonably understandable volume and pitch;

(v) Program-length television, radio, or Internet-hosted multi-media advertisement disclosures shall be made at the beginning, near the middle, and at the end of the advertisement; and

(vi) Nothing contrary to, inconsistent with, or that undermines the required disclosures shall be used in any advertisement in any medium, nor shall any audio, visual, or print technique be used that is likely to detract significantly from the communication of any disclosure.

(b) *Medium-specific disclosures.* All offers of free credit reports shall prominently include the disclosures required by this section.

(1) *Television advertisements.* (i) All advertisements for free credit reports broadcast on television shall include the following disclosure in close proximity to the first mention of a free credit report: “This is not the free credit report provided for by Federal law.”

(ii) The disclosure shall appear at the same time in the audio and visual part of the advertisement. The visual disclosure shall be at least four percent of